

## Sawbones 243: Ether

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**Justin:** Hello! This is Justin McElroy, America's favorite son of podcasting. I just want to let you know that we recorded this episode live in Atlanta, and there's a weird audio issue where there's a—when things get a little bit loud there a popping noise, and it is kind of annoying, but we didn't wanna deny you this episode, so, uh, we hope you can still enjoy it, and we'll be back with you pop-free next week. Bye.

**Intro (Clint McElroy):** *Sawbones* is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** But we choreographed that whole dance backstage!

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** And you just let me do my half! Hello everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones*: a marital tour of misguided medicine.

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy!

[audience cheers]

**Sydnee:** And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

[audience cheers louder]

**Justin:** It's fine. I figured this one out. It's fine. We're married, so legally half of that was mine.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** [through laughter] So you see, I—

**Sydnee:** Well, but then half of yours was mine, and so—

**Justin:** Okay, alright, Dr. Accountant!

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Didn't realize you were a doctor of maths. Hey.

**Sydnee:** Hey! It's great to be back!

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** Yes, yes. The beautiful Cobb Energy Performing Arts Center in beautiful Atlanta, Georgia.

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** Once again. Uh—

**Sydnee:** I—I lived in Georgia.

**Justin:** Yes! We forgot to tell you that last time.

**Sydnee:** For a very—yeah, a very short—for, like, five years.

**Justin:** That's not short, in the grand scheme of things.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** Well, I was really little.

**Justin:** Our child is four, so...

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** I was really little! But, I mean, I basically—I lived in Waycross, Georgia?

[scattered cheers]

**Sydnee:** Alright!

**Justin:** Okay! I told you! I told you somebody would be from Waycross.

**Sydnee:** I—I wondered.

**Justin:** Somebody said, "I'm sorry." [laughs]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Waycross rules. I've hear a lot of great stories about it.

**Sydnee:** There was a swamp... it was cool. [laughs]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** And other great things. Some people here live in Waycross—

**Sydnee:** No, I like it!

**Justin:** —[crosstalk] Waycross!

**Sydnee:** It was great! I mean I was, like—like, four to nine? So, I mean, I don't remember a lot, but I loved it! It was good. No, I always wondered if it was named that because it's like Way Cro—Way Cross? Like, you know, Way Cross?

**Justin:** It's Way Cross Georgia. 'Cause it's Way—it is across—

**Sydnee:** I don't know.

**Justin:** Everybody pull up Google Maps.

**Sydnee:** [simultaneously] No, I have many happy memories.

**Justin:** If you can. It's [maps.google.com](https://maps.google.com).

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** And... uh, so what are we talkin' about tonight, Syd?

**Sydnee:** Well, I always try to find for our lives shows—I always try to find something that will connect to where we are, and we have—we've done shows here before. So, like, there's only so many things we've talked about.

**Justin:** We did, uh, soda?

**Sydnee:** Yeah, we talked about Coke.

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] We celebrated Coke. We—and not Brad's Drink.

**Justin:** Not Brad's Drink. Boo, Brad's Drink!

**Sydnee:** That's Pepsi. Um, we talked about the CDC. So, um, I had to, you know, find something that would be connected to Georgia, but it took me a while to get there. And so we're gonna start off talking about ether.

[scattered cheers]

**Justin:** Somebody here—

**Sydnee:** Some ether fans—

**Justin:** —is a *huge* fan of ether.

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** There was an audible "Yes!"

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** "Finally, ether!"

**Sydnee:** Justin, do you know what ether is?

**Justin:** When your.. MP is low—

[audience laughs and cheers]

**Sydnee:** I—I don't...

**Justin:** My people!

**Sydnee:** I know. Everybody gets it but me. [laughs]

**Justin:** That's what the MP stands for. My people.

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Uh... it refills your mana. It's for your mana, Syd.

**Sydnee:** So—[laughs] no. It's a cla—it's actually a class of organic compound. Are you excited now?

[scattered cheers]

**Audience Member:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** It's—if you have an oxygen atom and it's connected to two acyl groups or two aryl groups—

**Justin:** [very close to the mic] There's 2700 people here.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** What we call ether is usually diethyl ether. That's what we re—when we talk about ether, that's usually what we're referring to. [laughs quietly]

[scattered cheers and laughter]

**Sydnee:** That's C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>5</sub> with a 2 and then an O.

[audience cheers loudly]

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] Is the chemical formula.

[audience cheers]

**Sydnee:** Just in case you wanna know! [laughs]

**Justin:** You know, we encourage kids to get into STEM, but we don't really think about the repercussions, do we?

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** This is what happens, folks! This is the outcome!

**Sydnee:** It's neat!

**Justin:** Okay, continue.

**Sydnee:** Okay. The name comes from the Greek for "upper air," because we also talk about, like, the ether, right? Like the—the poetic ether. That's not the science. Um, and—[laughs] what we think of as ether, diethyl ether, we're talking about what we used to use for a long time for anesthesia. We don't use it so much today, although it is used sometimes, but this is where it intersects with medicine. Now, if you were to come into contact with ether, it's a liquid. It's a colorless liquid. It's *very* flammable, so be very careful.

Um, but it also smells nice!

**Justin:** You're—you're kind of creating a honeypot now, Smirl. You realize that?

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** Kind of a trap for me. Like... highly flammable, smells good, do wanna check it out.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** Also, as we—so we—we discovered ether all the way back in 1275, but we figured out that it could get us kind of messed up?

**Justin:** Yesss.

**Sydnee:** In the 1500's. Uh, our buddy Paracelsus—

[scattered cheers]

**Sydnee:** —was actually one of the first ones who figured out that this ether stuff—it—

**Justin:** Now, Paracelsus, real quick, is he the one that, uh, people can go to [mcelroymerch.com](http://mcelroymerch.com)—

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** —and get a t-shirt with his visage on it right now, that says "I am different, let this not upset you?"

**Sydnee:** Mm-hmm.

**Justin:** You could just buy that now?

**Sydnee:** That's right, that's right.

**Justin:** It's shipping now? It's [mcelroymerch.com](http://mcelroymerch.com)?

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** That was good! That was very smooth.

**Justin:** Yeah, thanks I just—

**Sydnee:** Right in there.

**Justin:** —you'd never notice it.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** Uh, he said—he called it "sweet vitriol." And he talked about ether. He said, "It quiets all suffering without any harm, and relieves all pain, quenches all fevers, and prevents complications in all diseases."

It doesn't do that.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** But what he was noticing is what people started to figure out pretty quickly, is that it kind of gets you high, or kind of drunk. Somewhere in between, but people *like* that.

Now, he noted that in chickens. He never thought to—[holding back laughter] to really apply that to humans. He just noticed the chickens were high, I guess.

**Justin:** He—

**Sydnee:** On ether.

**Justin:** —he knew that the chickens had had their suffering quieted?

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** That dude was very in tune with chickens, eh?

**Sydnee:** He just loved chickens. Uh, and if you—so you know, if you drink ether—'cause you can. I mean, I'm not saying "do it," I'm just saying you can—you can also inhale it—

**Justin:** You can drink anything, Syd. [through laughter] I mean—

**Sydnee:** That's fair. There's—there's a point to be made—

**Justin:** —you can and should drink ether? It's, like, not bad?

**Sydnee:** No. I mean, it will—so—

**Justin:** [wheezes]



**Sydnee:** —similarly to alcohol—

**Justin:** I'm, like, ordering it on Ebay right now.

**Sydnee:** No...

**Justin:** You have to legally tell me if it's—

**Sydnee:** No, don't do that. Don't do that.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** It will get you kind of drunk, but also it will make you hallucinate some, and feel a lot of euphoria—

**Justin:** Yes!

**Sydnee:** —so it's a pretty—

**Justin:** Good, yes!

**Sydnee:** —it's an intense narcotic, I would say. I've ne—I mean, I've never done—I don't—I don't know. But that is my understanding. I think it's in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. I think they talk about it.

[scattered cheers]

**Sydnee:** Like, the ether—like, he names, like, a big list of drugs and at the end he's like, "But the ether is the thing you really gotta watch out for, 'cause that'll really mess you up."

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** So this is ether. Um, you can drink it. Is it dangerous? Yes. [through laughter] It's very—it's very volatile? So I was reading, like, what can it do? Well, it can cause hiccups. Well, okay. I got some hiccups. It can also rupture your stomach.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly] And it boils—it beco—so it's going to be—it's a liquid, but it's gonna become a gas at 95 degrees Fahrenheit, so in your bodies, it's a gas. Like, it happens.

**Justin:** Whoa!

**Sydnee:** 'Cause you're above that. Hopefully, hopefully.

**Justin:** That seems less than ideal!

**Sydnee:** So—so it's already a gas inside you. It was very popular in the 1800's, because as the temperance movement started to take over right now everybody was like, "Hmm, alcohol's really evil, I shouldn't drink alcohol... [through laughter] I'll drink ether..."

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** "... instead." So there were certain—especially certain parts of the world. In Ireland it became very popular. Like, there was one point, like, by 1890 about 17,000 gallons of ether [holding back laughter] was being drunk each year. People were really into ether.

There were parts of, like, Poland where it was very popular. And you could mix it in different ways, so people would drink it with just a little bit of water, if they just wanted it straight. Just, like, some ether and water.

Um, you could mix it with some, like, sugar and cinnamon and cloves, and it was enjoyed by, like, all classes. Like, miners would take it with their coffee.

**Justin:** That's nice.

**Sydnee:** Into the mines. Which actually became a huge problem after a while, because there were all these miners [through laughter] who were really messed up on ether... who were mining.

Um, and then among they upper classes they would do—like, there was one cocktail that I found that was, like, you'd take a strawberry and you cut it, and then you put some drops of ether in your strawberry, and then you drop it in champagne and you drink it, and you go on a fun trip. With your fancy buddies. With your ether!

**Justin:** We—I almost never feel this way on *Sawbones*, but you ever feel like we missed all the good stuff?

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** It's like, don't you miss being able to be like, "Plop!" and then someone's like, "[deep voice] Jeremiah, is that bad for you?"

And you can look at them and say, "[deep voice] I have no way of knowing."

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** "[deep voice] It's 18-whatever. Who knows! Anyway."

**Sydnee:** "Someday they'll talk about it on a podcast." [laughs]

**Justin:** "[deep voice] What's a podcast?"

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** "Who cares?"

**Justin:** "[deep voice] I'm Benjamin Franklin."

**Sydnee:** [laughs loudly]

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** Did he say that?

**Justin:** "[deep voice] [holding back laughter] This is the room where it happens."

[audience laughs and cheers]

**Sydnee:** Uh, so—[laughs] um, it was actually—it was sold in pubs. Like, you could go up and order a beer or a glass of ether. A pint of ether. Can you imagine that?

Um, and then you could also inhale it, of course. So, like, people were drinking it, but you could inhale it, which it will work much faster if you inhale ether, but then it goes away faster too, so. I don't know.

**Justin:** [through laughter] With very few exceptions so far, this feels like Sydnee and I are doing an infomercial for the fact that we're bringing back ether! Like, and look under your chairs, because—

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** —it's back!

**Sydnee:** *You* get ether, and *you* get ether, and *you* get ether!

**Justin:** [simultaneously] *You* get ether and *you* get ether!

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** [through laughter] I saw a few of you look under your chairs, thank you very much!

[mic thumping?]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] It's great because—it's gonna get to medicine, I promise, but I love about it is the idea that we found this thing and we were like, "Oh, this feels so good! I want it to be medicine! Let's make it medicine."

**Justin:** [laughs loudly]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That's such a—that's so human!

**Justin:** That should be—that's the alternate title of *Sawbones*. "I want it to be medicine."

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] That's so human! We do that, right? We're like, "I love beer. It's gotta be good for me, right? I'm gonna find a study that says it's good."

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** "Coffee's good now, right? Coffee's good."

**Justin:** "Dark chocolate, I love."

**Sydnee:** "It's gotta be good for me. So, uh, I thought—I love this quote. Oliver Wendell Holmes was a big fan of using ether. And he gave this big speech at Harvard at a graduation, and what he said about ether was, "The mighty music of the triumphal march into nothingness reverberated through my brain and filled me with a sense of infinite possibilities, which made me an archangel for the moment."

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** "The veil of eternity was lifted. The one great truth which underlies all human experience and is the key to all the mysteries that philosophy has sought in vain to solve—"

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** "—flashed upon me in a sudden revelation!"

**Justin:** So if you go to [Kickstarter.com/](https://www.kickstarter.com/)—

[audience laughs and cheers]

**Justin:** —ether2—

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** So as everybody was enjoying ether, it was a natural fit for people who made patent medicines. So, medicines that weren't really medicines but people sold and pretended like they were medicines, 'cause we didn't have rules back then. So you could just say, "This is medicine. Got some alcohol, or some ether, or some marijuana, or some heroin—I don't know, whatever. It'll make you feel good!"

People got on that ether train and started selling Hoffman's Drops, which were [holding back laughter] one part ether to three parts alcohol.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** And initially, like everything, were marketed for menstrual cramps.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** 'Cause they were like, "Here. Just take this. You'll be fine. Here."

This is all through medical history, right?

**Justin:** Sorry.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** But they were so popular that people started using them for everything. They were like, "Well, [through laughter] I want some of those Hoffman's Drops. You seem to feel great. Um... so I want some, too."

And it was the same with Dr. Kelly's remedy, which was—it was just ether. It was just, "Here's some ether." Uh, but they were incredibly popular medicines for whatever ailed you.

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[theme music plays]

**Justin:** Hope you all are enjoying our live episode. Uh, we'll be back with you again next week, but in the meantime, um, I wanna tell you about a couple of sponsors. First up is Audible.

If you love to read, it can be hard to find the time to sit down and actually stare at a book. And also, what do all the squiggles mean? Nobody's sure. *But*, through the power of Audible you could have your favorite books read to you while you're washin' the dishes or, uh, practicing Taekwondo, like myself. Whatever. Uh, you can get your books on, uh, Audible and just—you can just—get—that—that's the way to do it! You don't wanna waste a bunch of time reading. Who's got time for that? Honestly! I—I know I don't.

Uh, I tell you what I've been enjoying, uh, recently, is a book called *Wonderland* by Steven Johnson about how play has, uh—has shaped our culture in ways that

we don't necessarily expect, so, uh, very much enjoying that book. And you can get a ton of other great ones at Audible.

They've got, uh, the largest selection of audiobooks on the planet, which lets you fill your summer with more stories. And, uh, Audible members get credit every month, good for an audiobook in their store, regardless of price, and unused credits roll over the next month. You don't like your audiobook, you can exchange it, no questions asked. Start a 30 day trial and your first audiobook is free. Go to [audible.com/sawbones](http://audible.com/sawbones). Or, you can text "sawbones" to 500 500, 5-0-0-5-0-0 to get started.

Also wanted to mention Winc. Uh, it is a wine delivery service. Winc takes all your preferences for wine, and you don't need to know a ton about wine, to, uh, get the best stuff from Winc, 'cause they're gonna ask you—they're not gonna ask you what your favorite maker of wine is, what's your favorite grape. Nobody knows! They're gonna ask you about *flavors* that you enjoy, stuff like that.

And, uh, they are gonna find wine that fits you. That's Winc, W-I-N-C. They help you discover great wine by matching your taste. And, did I mention, they ship 'em right to your door. There's no membership fees. You can skip any month, cancel any time and, uh, it's well worth trying out. Especially if you're not, like, a wine expert. This is the way to do it! You're gonna learn a little bit more, and drink some great wine in the process.

So, go to [trywinc.com/sawbones](http://trywinc.com/sawbones) and get \$20 off your first shipment. That's trywinc, T-R-Y-W-I-N-C.com/sawbones for \$20 off. [trywinc.com/sawbones](http://trywinc.com/sawbones).

Uh, gonna get back to the show. Thanks to everybody for listening. Uh, of course we know the audio—always a few audio hiccups in a live setting. Thanks for hanging in there, hope you're still enjoying yourself. And, uh, we'll be back again with you next week, so take care, and back to the show!

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**Sydnee:** And as its recreational use grew, its medicinal use was growing too, and people were trying to find new ways to use it. And as doctors started to realize that, um, the volatility of it—so it could very easily go from liquid to gas form—it could maybe be helpful for stuff that was wrong with your lungs, I don't know, 'cause now it's a gas! That's as far as I can figure the reasoning went.

Like, "Well, now it's a gas! You can inhale that, so let's use it for asthma! Let's use it for colds! Let's use it for a cough. For pertussis. For whatever. If it's wrong with your lungs, we'll probably use ether for it," and so it became a really popular cure-all for a while.

**Justin:** Uh, yeah. I mean, I'm already on board. I was already taking it? A lot of it. Heaps of the stuff? But now that it'll fix my pertussis I'm like, "Yeah."

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Now... I promise I'm gonna get to where it connects to Georgia. We're about to get there.

So, the rest of the world was just partying high on ether. The US was kind of slow to catch up with this. For a while it really wasn't being used recreationally the way it was everywhere else. Um, but there were a few places in the US where it started to be very popular, specifically in the South. And among, like, elite socialites it was very popular, and among the academic elites it became very popular to, instead of getting drunk, have these ether parties, [holding back laughter] or ether frolics—

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** —as they came to be known. And especially among medical students! It was—it was—you had a long week of studying and you had exams and you were just worn out, and so they would all go on an ether frolic. [laughs quietly] Where you would just drink some ether or inhale some ether. And it was the same as, like, getting drunk with your buddies, except everybody was, you know, drinking ether.

And this is where we enter... Dr. Crawford Long.

[scattered cheers]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Who has fans!

**Justin:** He's here tonight! That's so cool!

[audience laughs]



**Sydnee:** Dr. Crawford Long, as you may have already guessed, was from Georgia. He was born in Danielsville, Georgia in 1815—

**Audience Member:** Yeah!

**Sydnee:** —uh—[laughs]

**Justin:** Daniel's here!

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Love your `ville, dude!

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** He went to the University of Georgia, which was then known as Franklin College.

[audience cheers]

**Sydnee:** At the age of 14. [pauses] And, uh, he—

**Justin:** [wheezes] Okay! We're just gonna breeze on past that, huh?

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** I mean, I don't think that was as uncommon back then.

**Justin:** Okay. He Doogied.

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] He Doogied. Uh, and then he went to study under a Dr. Grant of Jefferson, Georgia.

[scattered cheers]

**Sydnee:** He went and learned medicine under him. He went—anyway, he studied other places that aren't Georgia. You probably don't care about that. But then he came back. [laughs] He came back to Jefferson and he started—he basically bought the practice from his mentor and started working as a physician there! He was also, by the way, Doc Holiday's cousin, which is always just, like, mentioned as a side note, which I find very cool. Like, Doc Holiday!

**Justin:** Yeah. *The Doc Holiday*.

**Sydnee:** *The Doc Holiday*. This was his cousin. Um, I don't think he was as good at cards. I don't know.

**Justin:** [laughs quietly]

**Sydnee:** So... Dr. Long observed the medical students. As far as I can tell, he did not participate. I have no evidence that he participated—

**Justin:** Ughhhh, you've gotta love *that* guy at the ether frolic, huh?

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** "[exaggerated southern accent] Uh, you all seem to be having a fine time. Don't mind me! I'll be in the corner."

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** "Taking copious notes."

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** "But please, enjoy your frolic! I'm fine. I've got a tonic water."

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] That—

**Justin:** This dude.

**Sydnee:** —[through laughter] you know—you don't know that's what—Justin right now is—this is my grandpa Dan. That's what he's doing.

**Justin:** It's not—I mean, I just have the one... voice, for that type—

**Sydnee:** It's my grandpa Dan!

**Justin:** —your grandpa Dan fits into an archetype that I—[exaggerated southern accent] Justin, explain—

**Sydnee:** Who is technically from Alabama, I will just say.

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** "[exaggerated southern accent] Justin... Justin, explain to me what the cloud is."

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** [through laughter] You're right! Okay, that is grandpa Dan, sorry.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] So Dr. Long was at an ether frolic and he was watching all these med students party, [through laughter] and he noticed that a lot of them, in addition to tripping, were also actually tripping, and falling, and hurting themselves, but didn't seem that upset about it! They were falling down a lot and then jumping right back up and, ha ha, laughing. And they had cuts and bruises and nobody seemed to notice. And he thought, "Maybe there's something in this that makes you resistant to pain."

[pauses]

Right?

**Justin:** Yeah! The ether! What?

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** So—so he decided to check his theory out. So, he had a patient, James Venable, who had a big cyst in his neck, and he wanted Dr. Long to remove it. And so he decided, "I'm gonna try to give you some of this ether before we remove this cyst, and see if—"

Because surgery, up til then—and we've talked about this before, and you probably could guess—surgery without anesthesia was horrible! It was very

painful, and very fast, out of necessity, because it was so painful. And a lot of patients just couldn't make it through the awful procedure. And so there were a lot of, you know, smart doctors working on the idea of, "How can we make surgery less painful?"

So he thought, "Well, maybe I'll give him some ether, and we'll see how it works."

So on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1842, he removed the cyst from Venable's neck and he used ether while he did it, and after it was all over he said, "How are you?" And he went, "I'm fine. I didn't feel anything. I feel great!" [laughs quietly] "I've been hallucinating this entire time!" [laughs]

**Justin:** "Do you... by chance... have any more of that ether?"

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** "I am... gaga for the stuff."

**Sydnee:** Now, this is a huge breakthrough, and he should've gotten a ton of attention for this... but he didn't, 'cause he didn't publish it. 'Cause he was very careful. And he said, "You know, I think this worked, but I wanna try it... [holding back laughter] maybe a few hundred more times. I'm gonna be very patient with this. Um, and I'm just gonna wait and see—maybe somebody else is using it? I'll—I'll start asking around. 'Cause I don't wanna—I don't wanna start saying it works unless I'm really sure that it works."

So he kinda sat on his hands, and he kept doing surgeries with ether, and they were successful. But he kept waiting to publish, and that is a big mistake, as anybody in the science world knows. If you've come up with a big breakthrough, you should probably jump on that, 'cause what happens if you don't? Well, a dentist does it first.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** [laughs quietly] So a dentist, Dr. William Morton, had also been experimenting with the idea that maybe ether could be used as an anesthetic. And he had used it a few times during some tooth extractions, and had had some success. So he had urged a surgeon friend of his, Dr. John Warren, to try it. Like, "Let's do it during a surgery. A tooth extraction is one thing. Let's do it when we're cutting somebody open, and see if it really works."

And so Dr. Warren agreed, and on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1846, so much later, Dr. Warren used ether to anesthetize Edward Gilbert Abbot, who also had a tumor in his neck. A lot of neck surgeries here.

But he did this at Massachusetts General Hospital, and after—

[single loud whoop]

**Sydnee:** —there's a big fan! [laughs quietly] And after he did that he said, "Hey, was there any pain?"

and the patient was like, "Nah, it was fine."

And he said, "Gentlemen, this is no humbug. Ether's the way to go."

And he published and became a huge sensation! Because he was the one who published it. And after that, there was this huge battle to decide who came up with ether first, because he published this, and then, like, two other doctors were like, "Wait, no."

Uh, Dr. Charles Jackson, Dr. Horace Wells were like, "No, I published—no, I—I did this first."

And then that's finally when Dr. Crawford Long was like, "Well, actually... [laughs quietly] I did this several years ago."

And so what ensued was known as the ether wars?

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Georgie Lucas is back.

[audience laughs]

[pauses]

**Justin:** That's it.

**Sydnee:** That's it? That's all you got?

**Justin:** They kind of filled in the rest. [mumbling] It's like, he's doin' ether wars, not *Star Wars* anymore.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** You get it.

**Sydnee:** But what happened is that Massachusetts got a lot of the credit because they did—as soon as they published, they starting doing ma—they did tons of surgeries there, uh, using ether, because they had this operating theater the became known as the ether dome. [laughs quietly]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Mad Max is back! And it—

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** And—and so they started doing tons of surgeries there, and it—it kind of got—like, it got the lead of—you know, everybody agreed, like, "This is the place! This is where ether started. This was the guy who came up with it. This dentist invented it, and this surgeon did it, and this is why we have ether today."

They actually—they did a recreation of that surgery in the year 2000, [holding back laughter] where they had a bunch of, like, actual surgeons in period costumes in the operating theater there at Mass Gen. Like, and a guy with a fake tumor made out of, like, latex on his neck. And, like, recreated it, taking pictures, like, "Look! We were first! Look at us! We were first!" [laughs]

**Justin:** Oh my God. Watching people take ether and LARPing surgery.

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Do you all know how to party or what?!

[audience cheers]

**Sydnee:** So... poor Dr. Long. By the time he actually published, in 1849, his *An account of the first use of sulfuric ether by inhalation as an anesthetic*, it was too late. Everybody else was jumping on it too. And so it took him a long time to get any notice for that. He kind of... gave up on that. I mean, he kept using ether, but

as far as getting the credit for it—'cause, like, Congress was giving, like, a \$200,000 prize to whichever of these doctors could say, like, "No, I came up with it first."

And he finally just threw up and his hands and said, "You know what? I'll just go back to practicing."

So he went to Athens—

[audience cheers]

**Sydnee:** —and he practiced medicine in Athens. Um, and he did—actually, he probably was one of the first doctors to use ether during childbirth. [pauses] For, like—for, like, the pain of labor. He was probably one of the first doctors to say, like, "Are you hurting? Here. This might help."

Um, because he delivered a lot of babies. Uh, and so he did that. He—he did... join the Confederate Army.

**Justin:** Awwww.

[pauses]

**Sydnee:** [sighs]

**Justin:** I know here it's kind of, like, mixed.

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** [through laughter] Where we come from, that's not great.

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** [through laughter] But I understand. Lotta hurt feelings. [wheezes]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** No, that's obviously not—not—

**Sydnee:** We're from West Virginia, so we kind of, like—

[scattered cheers]

**Sydnee:** —we kind of, like, double seceded. We seceded from your secession, so...

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Alright. So it's kind of like, "Who seceded first?" We're not gonna get into it.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** Don't worry, though. It was, like, the—the last great thing we really did. Since then we've been, like, diggin' up fossil fuels and—

**Justin:** Ummm...

**Sydnee:** —voting for rich New Yorkers who duped us, so, you know.

**Justin:** Billy Crystal went to Marshal for a year and played softball!

[audience cheers]

**Sydnee:** Anyway. Eventually Long did get some credit for—'cause he did. He came up with this discovery, ether. He probably really was the first doctor to use it successfully. Um, and eventually he got credit for that and was recognized, and we know that because he got, like, a—there's a county named after him, correct? Long County? I'm not making that up? In your state? Georgia?

[a couple whoops]

**Sydnee:** [laughs] I believe he got a county. He got a stamp. He got a hospital. He got, like, a statue. There's a museum in Jefferson if you wanna visit. It's \$5 for adults. It's 3 if you're an anesthesiologist, though.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** So... [laughs] so check that out.

**Justin:** Finally get them a break.



**Sydnee:** [laughs]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** Money's tight for those—those cats. [through laughter] That \$2 is gonna stretch.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** And—[laughs] and according to his website he is known as the father of painless surgery, *or* the father of modern anesthesiology, according to his website. So—so he eventually got his due. And—

**Justin:** According to his website?

**Sydnee:** According to his website.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** No! But this is what I found most intriguing. So, the day he did that surgery, March 30<sup>th</sup>... is Doctors Day! Which *I* know because every March 30<sup>th</sup>, the hospital I work at gives me a gift certificate to a local restaurant for, like, \$25.

**Justin:** Nice.

**Sydnee:** So I know—[laughs] I know that!

**Justin:** Applebee's, here we come!

**Sydnee:** That's in honor of this—of Dr. Crawford Long and his ether, and his neck... cyst. Not tumor. That was the other guy. This was the cyst.

**Justin:** Do we still use ether?

**Sydnee:** Very rarely. Ether is rarely used today, because the flammability was a big issue.

**Justin:** Big problem.

[audience laughs]

**Sydnee:** As you can imagine. And so we found things that weren't so flammable to use. Um, it is still used in places where, like, resources are limited. Sometimes using ether appropriately is a really good skill to have, so you will still find it used throughout the world, but most of the time, no.

Um, it *is* still used recreationally? [laughs quietly] Um, specifically I found this recipe among a specific group of people who live in, like, parts of the Ukraine? Where they mix, uh—they pour some ether over milk with sugar and orange juice in a shot glass, and then you drink it? [laughs quietly]

**Justin:** So you would say you're probably on... uh, one, two, three, four, five—every list the FBI has—

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** —at this point, probably. Like, illegal ether cocktails, Ukraine—

**Sydnee:** [through laughter] I'm searching—I'm doing this episode and I'm lookin' like, "Recreational uses of ether. Ether cocktails." [laughs]

**Justin:** "Ether—reasonably priced ether on Ebay."

**Sydnee:** "Ether for fun." [laughs]

**Justin:** Oh. I feel bad, 'cause you brought your whole beer out here and you've barely been able to—let me—let me—I'll vamp for the end. That's the end of the episode. Thank you so—

**Sydnee:** Just got a few seconds.

**Justin:** —thank you so much for coming, Cobb Energy Center for the Performing Arts.

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** Uh, Atlanta, thank you for having us. Uh, we will be back after a brief intermission with *My Brother, My Brother, and Me*, so make sure you submit your questions. Thank you to The Taxpayers for the use of our song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. Sydnee, do you have any special thanks?

[scattered cheers]

**Sydnee:** Thank you! Uh, to you, Georgia!

**Justin:** Thank you!

**Sydnee:** Atlanta, thank you!

[audience cheers]

**Sydnee:** Thank you for having us back!

**Justin:** I don't know, uh, if there are any left in the lobby. We got some promotional cards for our book that's comin' out October 9<sup>th</sup>.

[audience cheers]

**Justin:** Uh, you can preorder it now by going to [bit.ly/thesawbonesbook](http://bit.ly/thesawbonesbook), and if everybody in this room would just buy six or seven—

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

[audience laughs]

**Justin:** —it would be just a big—it would a big hit. Uh, that is gonna do it for us, folks. So until next time, my name is Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:** And, as always, don't drill a hole in your head!

[audience cheers]

[theme music plays]

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